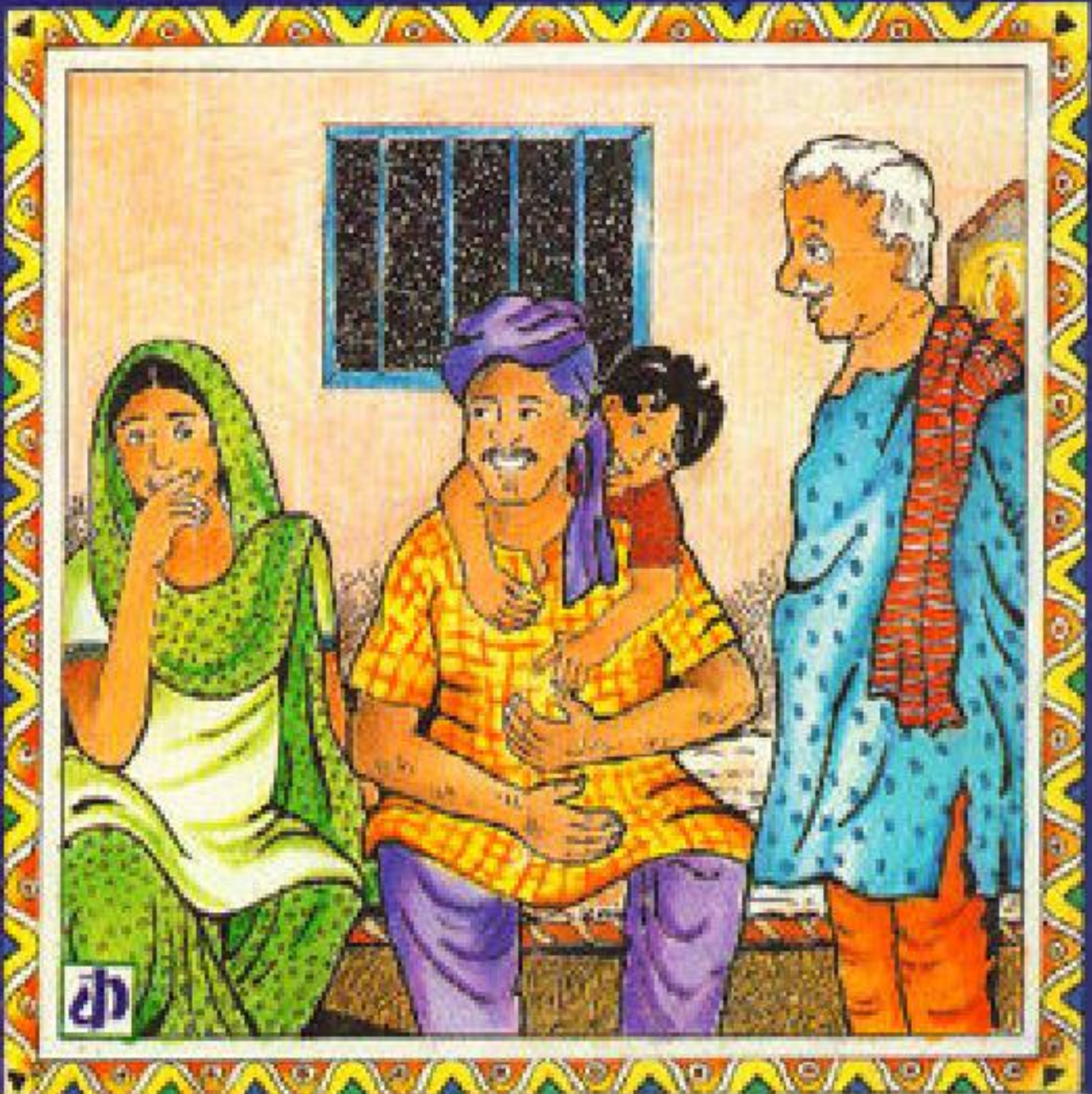


BHOLA

Rajendra Singh Bedi

Illustrations: Sujata Khanna





Rajendra Singh Bedi

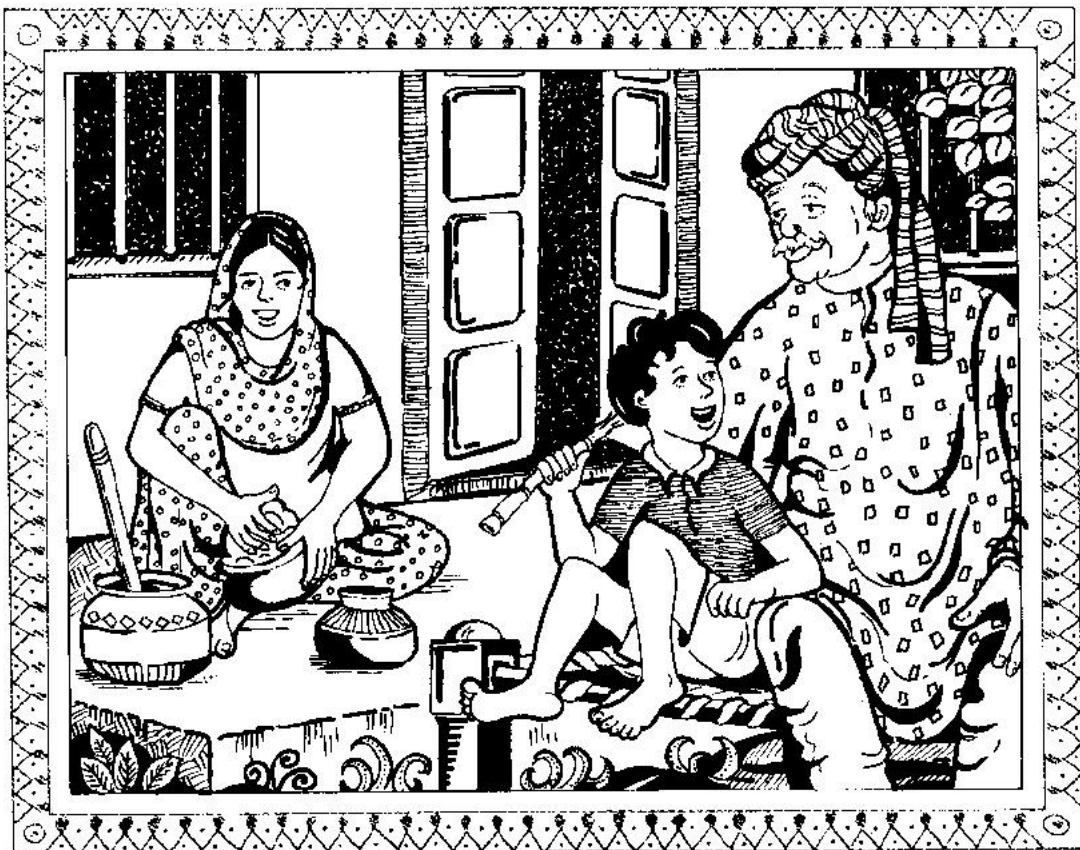
Rajendra Singh Bedi was an Urdu writer. However, his mother tongue was Punjabi. The truthfulness reflected in his stories is rarely seen. His works are not numerous, but they all leave a strong impact.

In his stories, he attempts to understand and create women from the heart. In 1965, he was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for his novel, *“Ek Chadar Maili See”*.

In this story he portrays the innocence of *Bhola*. His mother's affection and grandfather's care have been described very simply which touches the heart.

Maya placed butter in a stone bowl.
It seemed some close relative from her family
was coming! Yes, I remember! Maya's
brother was coming two days later.

Little Bhola said while sucking sugarcane,
“Baba! Mamu will come the day after
tomorrow, right?”





I picked up my grandson and kissed him, saying, "Tell me Bhola, how is your Mamu related to your mother?"

Bhola thought and said, "He is Mamu!"

Maya stopped reciting the Gita and started laughing. I enjoyed her laughter. Maya was a widow, but I hadn't imposed any restrictions on her eating or dressing. Still, she lived a very simple life.

After finishing the prayer, she called his son and asked, “Bhola, what are you to Nanhi?”

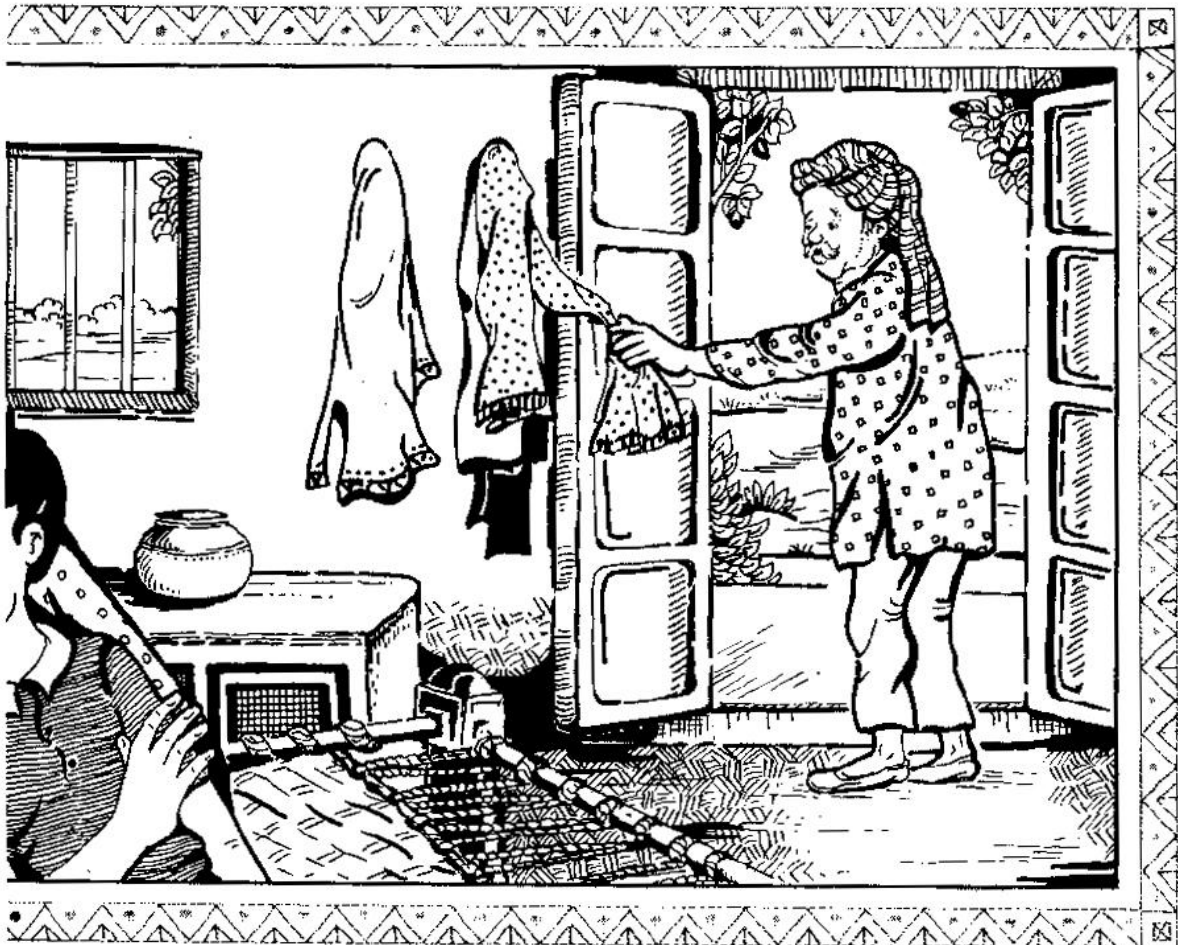
"Brother."

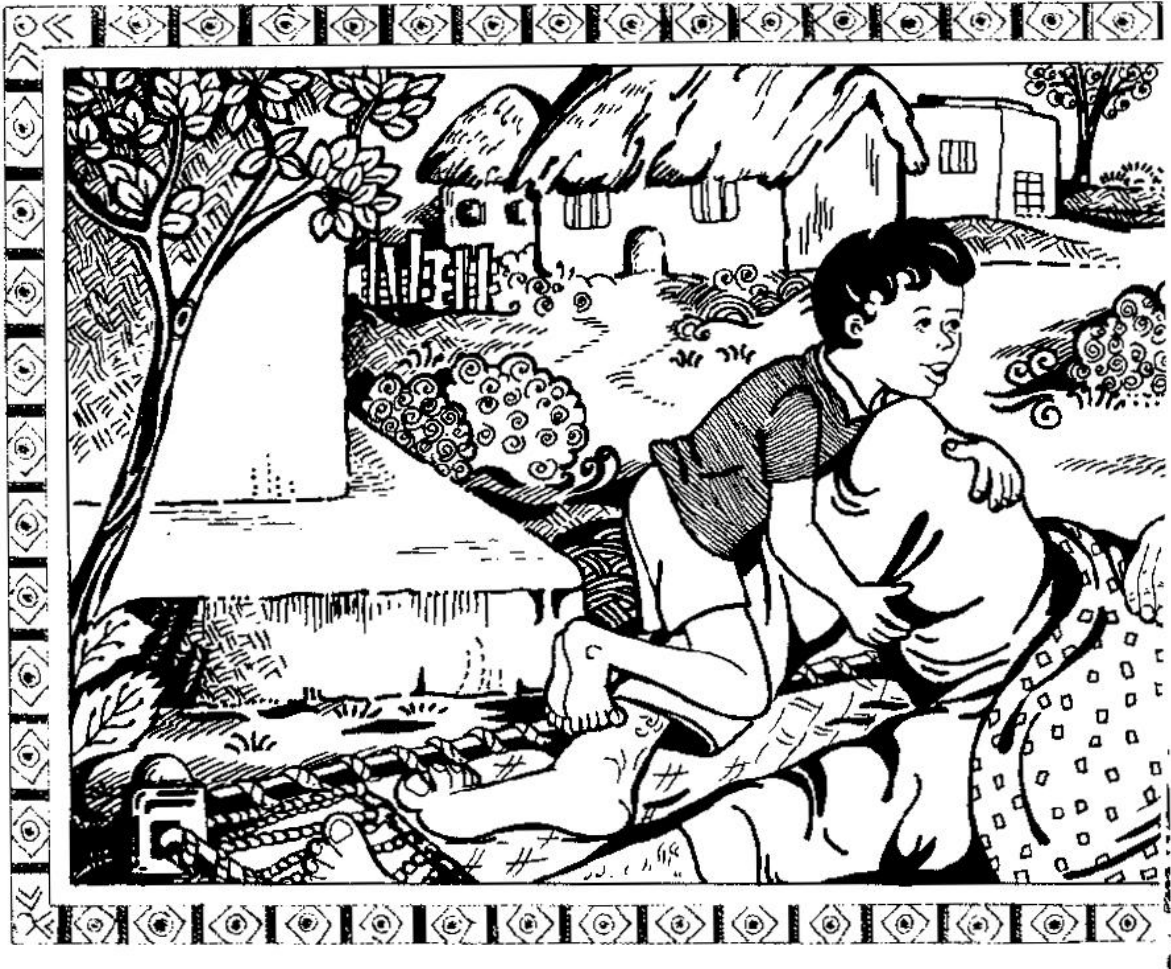
“Similarly, your Mamu is my brother.”

Bhola couldn't understand it. He jumped up and sat in his mother's lap and insisted on listening to the Gita. He was very fond of stories.



That afternoon I had to deliver ploughs to my customers six miles away. My old body, battered by hardship, couldn't bear the burden anymore. My son's death had broken my back. Now, Bhola was my only support.





That night, I was so tired that I dozed off as soon as I lay down. Bhola, still awake, said, "Babaji! Please tell me a story!"

"No, son! I'm too tired today! I'll tell you a story tomorrow afternoon!" Bhola sulked, "I'm not Baba's Bhola. From now I'm Mother's Bhola."



Bhola knew I couldn't bear to listen to such words. But I was too tired from carrying the ploughs. So I listened quietly to Bhola's words. Soon I fell asleep.

In the morning too, Bhola was upset with me. Perhaps that's why he didn't come to sit in my lap.



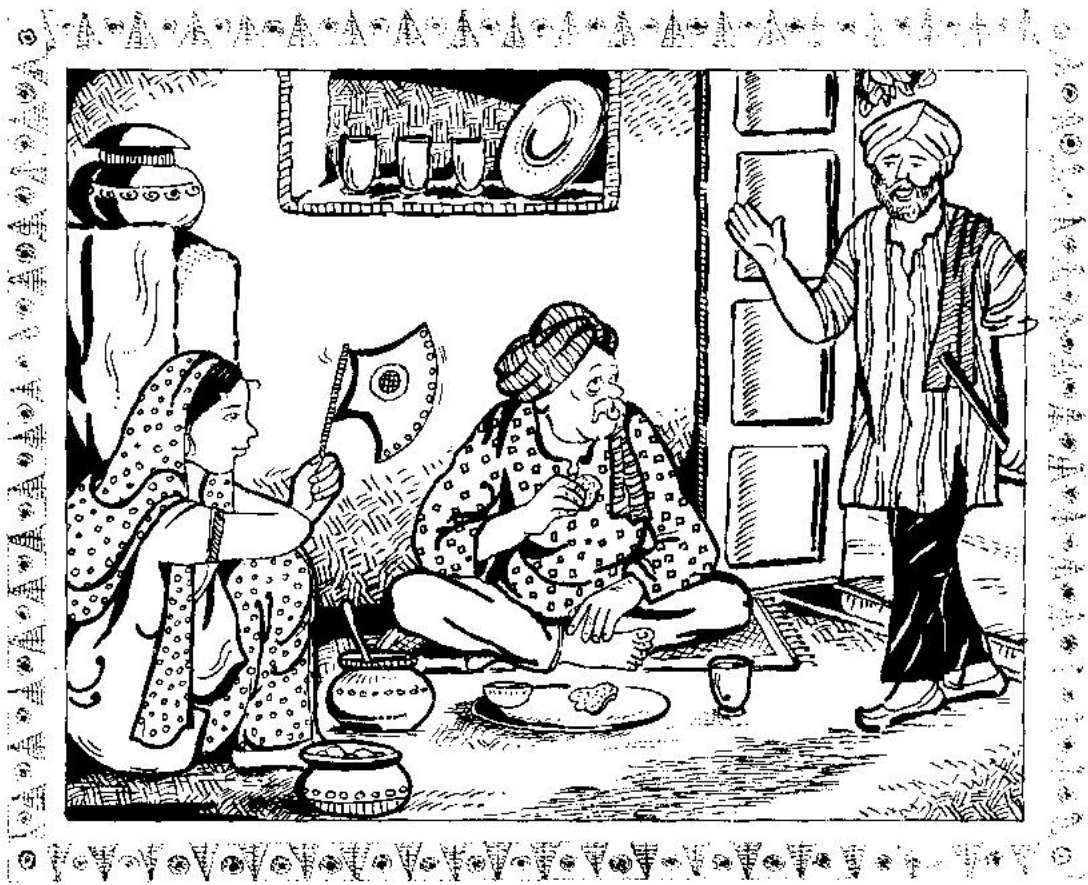
I convinced Bhola by luring him with sweets.

Maya had by now stored a pound of butter for her brother. I was thinking about the love between brother and sister when Bhola asked, "Baba! Do you remember your promise?"

"Which one, son?"

"You have to tell me a story this afternoon!!"

Bhola must have been waiting anxiously for the noon to arrive, because he insisted that I feed him early.



I had just taken my last bite when the Patwari came. Today he had the time to measure the land for the Khanqah well. I saw Bhola. He was running around laying out his bed.



I told the patwari, "I'll join you soon." Hearing this, Bhola became very sad. Maya suggested that I postpone the work, but I refused.

I tried to dissuade Bhola, "Son! Travelers forget their way if you tell stories during the day."

Bhola didn't believe it and started to cry. I had some spare time left. So, lying down, I said, "Okay, but if any traveler loses his way, the blame will be on you!"



Then I told him a story about seven princes and seven princesses. Bhola loved stories in which the prince and princess ended getting married. I told him a similar story. But this time, Bhola wasn't too happy.

After telling the story, I headed for the well. When I returned in the evening, Bhola was still eagerly waiting for his Mamu.

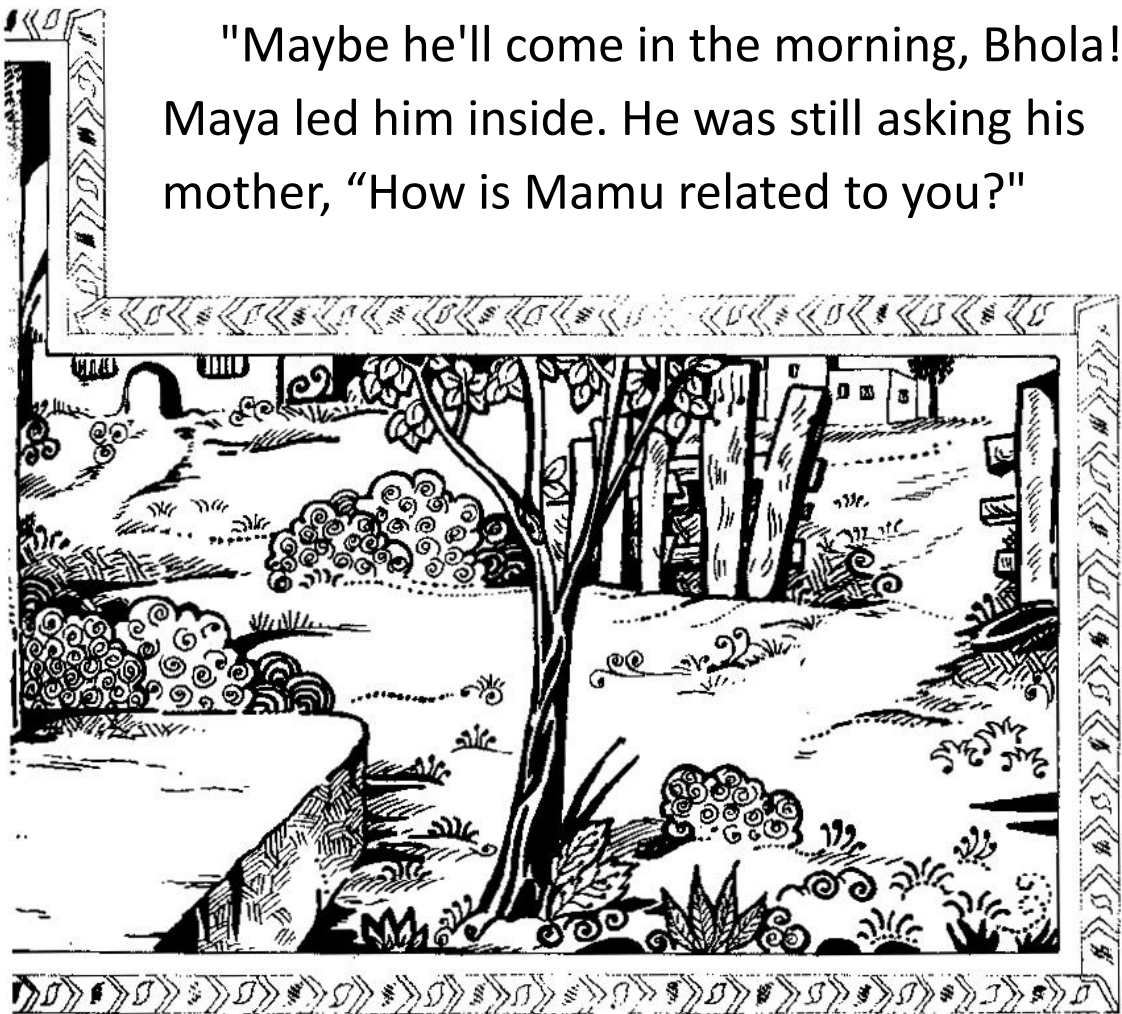
"Baba, Mamu will be coming today! He will bring sweets with him which you've never seen before."



That evening Bhola waited for his Mamu at the door. It grew dark, but Mamu still didn't come. Maya began to worry. I consoled her saying, "Maybe he's got busy with some urgent work, that's why he couldn't come..."

I forcibly lifted Bhola from the door. He was even more worried. "Mother, why hasn't Mamu come?"

"Maybe he'll come in the morning, Bhola!" Maya led him inside. He was still asking his mother, "How is Mamu related to you?"

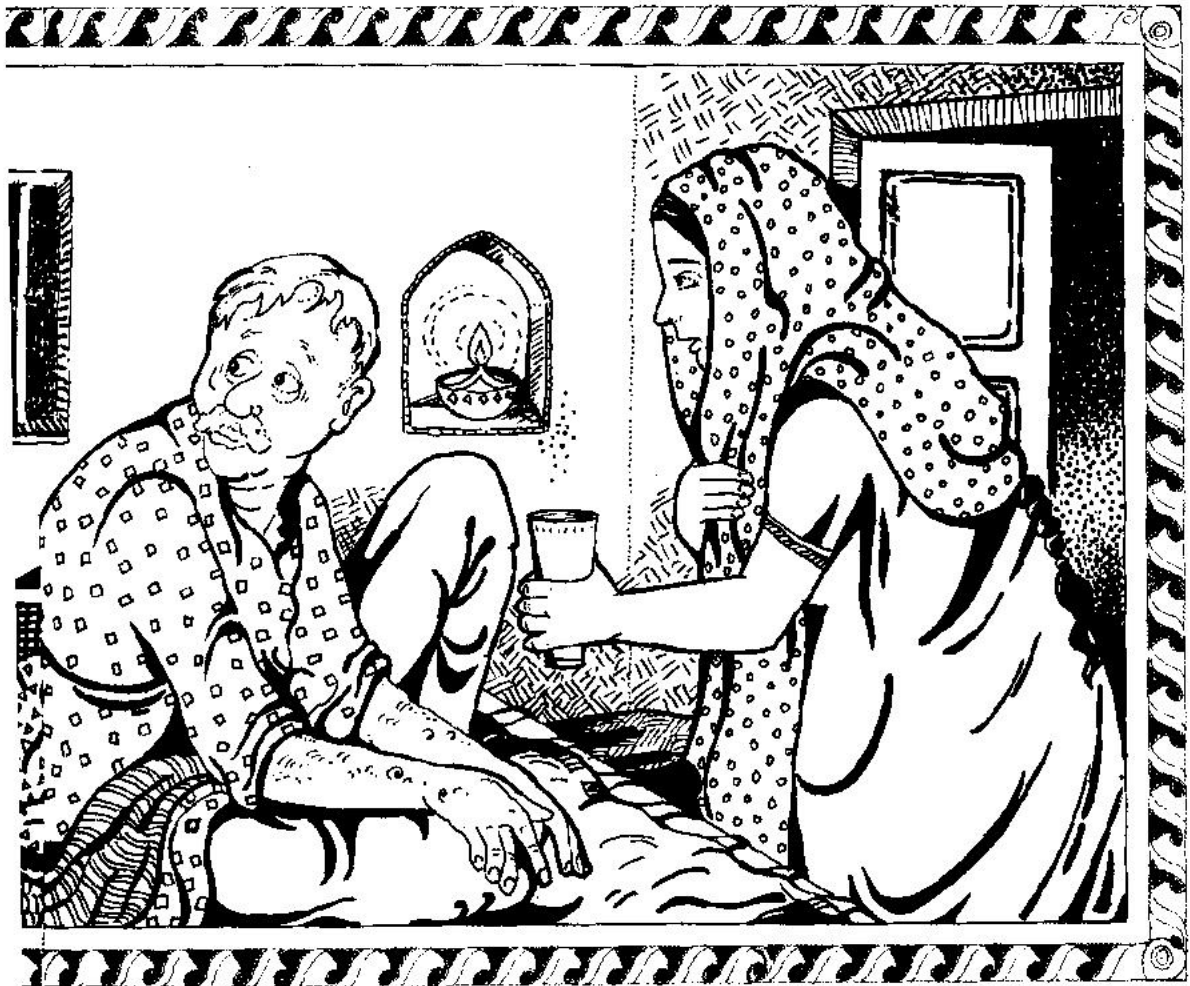




Entangled in relationships he couldn't figure, the innocent boy soon slept. While lying down, I somehow felt that now Maya's brother wouldn't come.

When Maya brought milk for me, Bhola sat up and said, "Why hasn't Mamu come as yet?"

"Son! He will come in the morning!"



Maya was also desperate, but actually she was exhausted from the day work. She fell asleep as soon as she lay down. Due to old age my sleep was shallow. On top of that, I was afraid of the thieves who had come to the fair to kidnap children. So I made Bhola lie down next to me. After that, I also slept.

When I opened my eyes, I saw the lantern was missing from the wall and Bhola was gone! I got very worried. I woke up Maya. I searched every corner of the house. I had no idea where Bhola was.

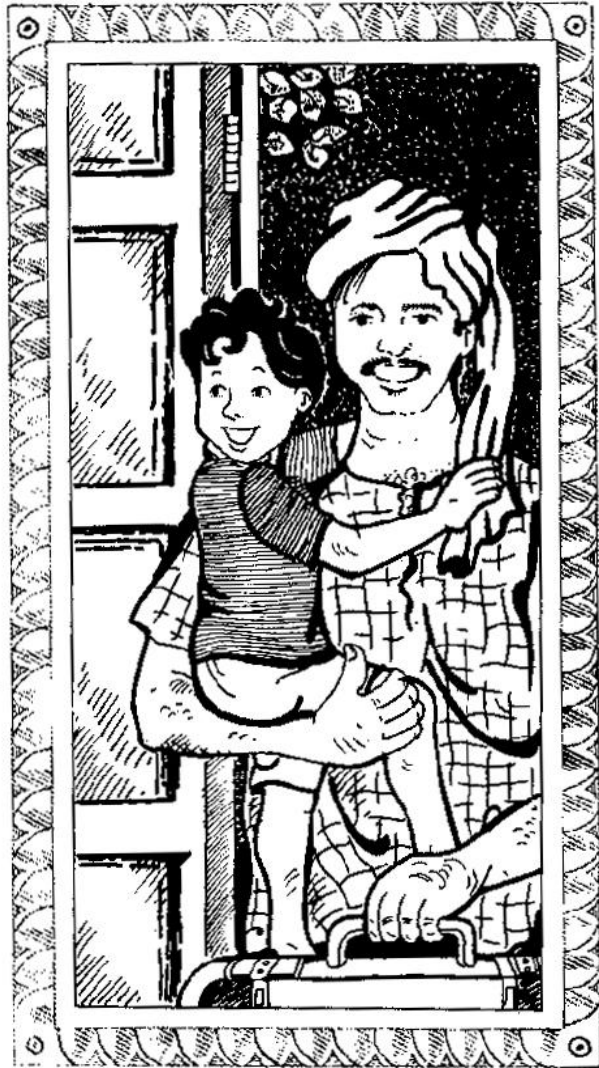
Maya hadn't cried as much since her husband's death as she cried now. The women from the neighborhood gathered. I was crying too.

Maya fainted. "Oh my God! It would have been better if you had picked me up!" I thought.



After a while Maya came to her senses. It was useless to comfort her.

At midnight, our neighbour went to lodge a report at the police station. We all waited for the morning.



Suddenly, Bhola's Mamu opened the door and came in. He was holding Bhola in his arms.

Seeing Bhola, we breathed a sigh of relief. Maya took Bhola in her lap and started kissing him.



Actually, Bhola's uncle finished his work late. Having left late, he lost his way in the dark. He was surprised when he saw a distant light on the road, leading to the village. He headed towards the light. When he got closer, he saw Bhola standing by road, entangled in thorns, holding a lantern.

When asked, Bhola said, "Babaji told me a story this afternoon saying that telling stories during the day makes travelers loose their way. I thought Mamu might have lost his way. Babaji also said, If someone traveler lost his way, it would be my fault, right?"

